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SUBJECT: CODEL MCCAIN MEETS IRAQI NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR

Classified By: ACTING COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL-MILITARY AFFAIRS EVAN G.
READE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: A Congressional delegation led by Senator John McCain (R-AZ) met on March 25, 2006 with Iraqi National Security Advisor Dr. Mowaffak al-Rubaie and members of his staff. Rubaie provided a briefing on the role of the National Security Advisor and the formulation of national security policy by the Iraqi government. In response to questions posed by members of the delegation, Rubaie admitted that there is a security problem in Baghdad which changed in nature following the February 22 bombing of the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra. Sectarian violence subsequently increased dramatically and the Iraqis, along with MNF-I, are making plans on how to deal with this change in paradigm. Nevertheless, terrorists continue to enter Iraq through Syria and they remain a long term problem. With regard to militias, Rubaie explained that most militias can be disbanded and reintegrated pursuant to Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Order 91, while there are plans to deal with Moqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia through political engagement. Rubaie ended the meeting with a plea for continued U.S. support to Iraq in its struggle to defeat terrorism and become a functioning democratic state. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Senator McCain's delegation was composed of Senator Russell Feingold (D-WI), Senator John Thune (R-SD), Rep. Mark Kirk (R-IL), Rep. Joe Schwarz (R-MI), Rep. Tom Udall (D-NM), Governor Tim Pawlenty (R-MN), Governor Bob Riley (R-AL), and Governor Jon Huntsman (R-UT). They met with Iraqi National Security Advisor Rubaie and members of his staff at Rubaie's office on March 25. Rubaie commenced the meeting in a rather formal style for the benefit of Iraqi television cameras he'd invited in for the meeting. He thanked the U.S. for its continuing support since April 2003, assured the delegation that Iraqis were "well unified" and that all attempts to foment disunity and strife would fail. Thanks to the sacrifices of the Iraqi people, the political process is well. Following his welcoming remarks the cameras were removed. Rubaie next presented a PowerPoint presentation outlining the role of the National Security Advisor and his staff. He described a number of institutions he participates on or chairs including the Ministerial Committee for National Security, the Deputy Ministers Committee for National Security, the National Intelligence Coordination Committee, the Joint Planning Committee, and the National Joint Intelligence Analysis Center.

RISE OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE GREATER THREAT THAN TERRORISM?

¶13. (C) Senator McCain told Rubaie that at a press conference just prior to the meeting, the delegation had been told by a number of reporters that the situation in Baghdad and the western provinces is worse today than it was last year. Rubaie conceded that in Baghdad the situation is not as the Iraqis would like it to be. Between October 2005 and February 2006 things seemed to be improving. However, following the bombing of the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra on February 22 sectarian violence erupted in a cycle of reaction and counterreaction. Accordingly, in Baghdad the problem of terrorism has been eclipsed by sectarian violence. Rubaie sought to assure the delegation that things are now under control and that the government, in conjunction with MNF-I, has a plan he cannot yet discuss to quell sectarian violence.

¶14. (C) Governor Riley sought to learn from Rubaie whether he considered sectarianism to be a greater threat in Iraq than terrorism. Rubaie said he didn't want to choose, saying to do so would be too difficult. However, before February 22 he would have said the country is facing two types of terrorists: international religious fanatics who were global in scope, and former Saddamists who are desperate to return to power and who he considered to be the greatest long-term threat to Iraq. February 22 represented a "shift in paradigm" that Iraq is now, along with MNF-I, taking steps to deal with. One of Rubaie's staffers opined that terrorism is more dangerous than sectarianism because the latter is because sectarianism can be controlled and halted by the leaders of the sects involved, and this would be done once a national unity government comes together that gives everyone a voice. Terrorism, on the other hand, will continue to receive support from individuals in the global terrorist network.

BAGHDAD 00001017 002 OF 002

¶15. (C) Senator Feingold asked Rubaie if there was a danger that foreign terrorists who came to Iraq and received training and experience now threatened the U.S. and Europe as well. Rubaie replied that Iraq is still a magnet for terrorists who continue to enter the country through Syria. Although he is not aware that any terrorist "trained" in Iraq has attacked the U.S. or Europe, terrorists from Iraq have struck in Jordan and elsewhere in the region.

ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

¶16. (C) Governor Riley asked how Iraq hopes to become economically viable if it can't protect its critical energy infrastructure. Rubaie said that he realizes that 97% of Iraq's economy depends upon its ability to export oil. In the south, the amount currently being exported is not enough to meet budget projections, but steps are being taken to increase production to approximately two million barrels exported per day. In the north, the situation is more serious. Both oil production and exports are down considerably. The government is working to solve this problem and has appointed a committee headed by a Deputy Prime Minister to supervise improving the security and productivity of the Kirkuk to Bayji and Bayji to Baghdad oil pipelines.

MILITIA PROBLEMS

¶17. (C) Senator Thune inquired about Iraq's plans to bring the militias under control. Rubaie explained that there are two approaches. Concerning the militias that were recognized by CPA Order 91, members could either be absorbed into the security forces, provided with job training, or given pensions depending upon their age and qualifications. With regard to JAM, which is not one of the militias recognized

under CPA Order 91 as eligible to participate in the transition and reintegration program, a strategy of political engagement will be pursued. Rubaie revealed that he had met that morning with MNF-I officers to discuss this plan and that it would be taken to the Prime Minister in the next few days for his endorsement.

¶8. (C) Rubaie concluded the meeting by appealing for continued U.S. support and assistance. "This is a pivotal experiment we're all involved in and we need your help to make it work."

¶9. (U) CODEL McCain did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before departing.

KHALILZAD